

Presentation of

MARY GRAICHEN CASE

ELDER ABUSE RESULTING IN DEATH

Presented to the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

October 20, 2003

Presented by: Officer Joseph K. Lofy

City of New Berlin Police Department

New Berlin, Wisconsin

Formerly an Investigator with the

Village of Shorewood Police Department

Victim: Mary Graichen 88-year-old female

Suspect: Edward Graichen 66-year-old male (son of victim)

Assisting Agencies:

Milwaukee County Department of Aging

North Shore Fire Department

Village of Shorewood Police Department

Milwaukee County Medical Examiners Office

Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office

Medical Staff of Froedtert Hospital

Village of Shorewood Health Department Staff

The first involvement the Village of Shorewood Police Department had in this case was in response to a request from the North Shore Fire Department. This is common in cases of individuals that are in need of being placed in "Protective Custody" for various reasons.

The North Shore Fire Department was sent to the Graichen residence for a woman with infected legs. The callers in this case were two Case Workers for the Milwaukee County Department of Aging. The Case Workers had been assigned to investigate a report that Edward Graichen was neglecting the needs of his mother. On Monday, 01/10/00, at 1:24 PM, the caseworkers arrived at the Graichen residence. They were able to get Edward Graichen to open the door and allow them into the house. The conditions they encountered, and the condition of Mary Graichen, prompted the 911 for an ambulance.

The Graichen house at 4261 N Farwell Av. in Shorewood, Wisconsin is in a middle class to upper middle class neighborhood. The duplex and yard appear to be well kept on the outside. Fig. 1 Edward Graichen and his mother Mary Graichen lived in the lower unit. The upper unit was empty at the time of this incident.

The inside of the house was a different and tragic story. All of the rooms were almost impossible to enter, much less use in their designed function. Figs. 2 –6 Each room had items piled 3 to 5 feet deep, covering the entire rooms. Something else not evident from the outside was the overpowering odor of urine, feces, and decaying human body. Fire and police personnel had to wear masks covering their mouths and noses. Other fire personnel used "Vick's vapor rub" beneath their noses to reduce the effect of the stench. While Medical personnel worked to remove the victim from the overstuffed armchair, an exhaust fan was set up to blow fresh air into through the front door. The "French doors" next to where the victim's chair was were opened to allow for venting of the overpowering odor. When officers that had been in the house during this incident, returned to the station, the odor of the house could still be smelled on their uniforms for sometime afterwards.

The refrigerator contained six separate bunches of bananas (still yellow in color), four unopened cans of Campbell's chunky soup, a packaged ham sub sandwich, and unopened jar of mayonnaise, and two paper bags from "Hardee's" restaurant. There was no evidence that a meal had been prepared in the kitchen for a while. Inside the freezer section there was observed, empty ice cube trays and insulated drinking cups inside.

The victim was Mary Graichen, an 88-year-old female. It was reported by family members that Mary Graichen, had once weighed over 200 lbs, she was now, under 100 lbs.

Mary Graichen was discovered sitting in chair, in the living room in her own waste. Mary Graichen was clothed and covered with a blanket. Mary Graichen could barely lift her head up, as it hung down. Her dentures were sitting on her chest along with food wrappers from Hardees. The workers described her hair and "One big snarly knot." They observed that Mary Graichen's eyes were open, but full of matter. Mary Graichen was filthy and smelled of rotting flesh. She had open wounds on her legs that were open and weeping fluid and blood. The workers were told that Mary Graichen was fed soft food, like bananas and would drink Diet Rite Soda. Mary Graichen was reportedly only eating "a little". The Case Workers called 911 to summon medical assistance for Mary Graichen.

Fire Fighters described Mary Graichen as having the appearance of "melting" into her chair. The Fire Fighters aiding Mary Graichen had to wear full fire fighting gear include self-contained breathing apparatus, in order to remain near her. As Fire Fighters and Paramedics removed Mary Graichen from the chair they observed that Mary Graichen's legs retained the shape of the chair. The fabric of the chair she had been sitting was deteriorated.

Once at the Hospital, the staff discovered that Mary Graichen had sores on her body that went right down to the bone. Doctors stated that Mary Graichen was severely infected, septic, malnourished, and dehydrated. Hospital staff said that her wounds were so severe that all they could do was to keep Mary Graichen comfortable. Fig. 7-8

Mary Graichen's son, Edward Graichen, was a 66-year-old male, who worked part time at a fast food restaurant. When Edward Graichen was interviewed, he stated that he did not know where to get help for his mother. Edward Graichen also knew that in home care was very expensive and had promised his mother that she would not go into a nursing home. Edward Graichen informed us that he had taken a course at MATC, to become a nurse's aid. He informed us that he had worked for sometime at a nursing home. Edward Graichen believed in his heart that he took good care of his mother.

How does this happen?

The Graichen's were a family that slipped through the cracks of society. The Village of Shorewood did not replace the Village Social Worker, when she retired. This was a missed opportunity to make personal contact at the house and possibly prevent this situation. The Village of Shorewood Health Dept. made only telephone checks to attempt to follow up with the Graichen's.

I have also assisted North Shore Fire Department personal on other incidents such as this. I recall two incidents similar to this case. The first was an elderly woman, who had open sores on her ankle that were infected and had maggots in the wound. The next case was a disabled male whose apartment walls were covered in his feces.

The police agency where I am currently employed has a “Find A Way” to solve community problems attitude. Our department employs two Police Social Workers who would make contact with citizens who maybe on verge of needing Services. They also assist in making referrals to the correct County Agencies.